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THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY H, 409TH INFANTRY,
(103D INFANTRY DIVISION) IN THE ATTACK ON
GRASSBERG AND HOHENBERG HILLS, IN THE HARDT
MOUNTAINS (VICINITY OF WISSEMBOURG, GERMANY)
18 - 22 DECEMBER 1944.
(RHINELAND CAMPAIGN)
(Personal Experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: INFANTRY HEAVY WEA-
PONS COMPANY SUPPORTING A BATTALION IN AN ATTACK
OF A FORTIFIED AREA IN MOUNTAINOUS TERRAIN.

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ADVANCED INFANTRY OFFICERS CLASS NO. II

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INTRODUCTION

This monograph describes the action of Company H, 409th Infantry, 103d Infantry Division, in support of the attack on Grassberg and Hohenberg Hills in the Siegfried Line in the Hardt Mountains north of Wissembourg, Germany, 18-22 December 1944.

For orientation purposes, a brief description of the series of events leading up to the action contained herein, is necessary.

By 8 November 1944, the advance of the Allied forces in Western Europe had progressed to a line extending from the Swiss border in the vicinity of Belfort, generally north to the vicinity of Metz, Luxembourg, Arnhem, then west to the North Sea. (1) (See Map A) The advance across France from the west and from the south had been more rapid than was anticipated, which had resulted in the over extension of supply lines, causing a temporary halt along the line mentioned. (2)

At this time, 8 November, the Allied strategy to bring Germany to her knees was unchanged. It was to be accomplished in three phases: first, to destroy or decisively defeat

(1) A-10, p. 57; (2) A-7, p. 19.

the German Army west of the Rhine River; second, to cross the Rhine and establish bridgeheads on the east bank; third, to drive into the heart of Germany in an all-out effort to bring the war to an end. (3)

The 6th Army Group, located on the southern flank of the Allied front, estimated that it could not support logistically a coordinated attack before the middle of November. (4) (See Map A)

On 13 November 1944, the United States Seventh Army launched its November offensive, which was coordinated with an offensive all along the western front. (5) (See Map B) This drive was to the northeast through the Vosges Mountains and had the mission of capturing Strasbourg and clearing its zone of the enemy west of the Rhine. (6) (See Map B)

Strasbourg fell to the French 2d Armored Division on 23 November, which completed the first part of the mission. The second part of this mission was delayed due to the fact that the Germans held the Colmar and Haguenau areas of the Alsatian Plain and both sides of the Vosges Mountains, which were situated along the Seventh Army's northern flank. (7) (See Map B)

Elements of the First French Army, which were on the Seventh Army's right, had driven to the Rhine north of Basel. The pocket formed by the drive to the Rhine at this point and at Strasbourg was later to be known as the "Colmar Pocket". (8) (See Map B)

(3) A-2, p. 696; (4) A-7, p. 19; (5) A-5, p. 389, 421, 423; (6) A-5, p. 403; (7) A-5, p. 422; (8) A-5, p. 420.

On the Seventh Army's left, the United States Third Army succeeded in the capture of Metz on 22 November. (9)

The Seventh Army's direction of advance was changed to the north on 24 November, at which time it was given the mission of assisting the Third Army in breaching the Siegfried Line between the Rhine River and Saarbruecken. Upon breaching the Siegfried Line, the Seventh Army was to exploit any unopposed bridgehead across the Rhine south of Mannheim. The Seventh Army's target was that part of the Siegfried Line from Neuberg on the Rhine River to Zweibruecken. The "punch" was now to be directed at Germany west of the Rhine. (10)

(See Map C)

Intelligence had estimated that the enemy would not defend in strength anywhere south of the German border. Isolated pockets of resistance were anticipated, but in general the Germans were expected to fight delaying actions from successive positions until they were back in the Siegfried Line. There they would make a stand to stop the advance. This estimate was issued by G-2, Seventh Army, early in December 1944. (11)

This information proved to be accurate, for the Seventh Army's attack to the north, which commenced on 5 December, moved rapidly against relatively light resistance, such as isolated enemy strong points and road blocks, until it hit the outer defenses of the Siegfried Line on 17 December 1944. (12)

The 103d Infantry Division which was a component of the Seventh Army, launched its attack across the Zintzel River,

(9) A-5, p. 418; (10) A-5, p. 418, 454, 455, 462; (11) A-5, p. 462; (12) A-5, p. 476; A-8, p. 42.

which was at flood stage, early on 9 December 1944, and joined the attack to the north. After pushing the attack from the Zintzel along the Lower Vosges Mountain, it crossed the German border on 16 December with two regiments abreast. The outer defenses of the Siegfried Line were a matter of hours away. (13) (See Map C)

THE GENERAL SITUATION

The Lower Vosges or Hardt Mountains are a continuation of the Vosges Mountain which extend from Saverne, France, northward across the German border to a point east of Kaiserslautern. (See Map A) This range consists of a series of heavily wooded hills forming very steep corridors, which run generally east and west. Some of these hills rise to the heights of 2,300 feet, dominating the Rhine Plain. The few roads and trails throughout the Hardt Mountains generally follow the corridors. The eastern slopes are steep and drop off abruptly onto the Rhine Plain. The western slopes are more gradual and spend themselves in the Saar Valley. (14) (See Map C)

The Siegfried Line in the zone of the Seventh Army, extended from the Rhine River west through Buchelberg, Stainfeld, then across the open space to Ober-Otterbach. Here it extended through the Hardt Mountains to Budenthal and Eppenbrunn, then to the northwest across open country to Windsberg and west again to Zweibruecken. (15) (See Map C)

(13) A-5, p. 474; A-8, p. 42; Personal knowledge; (14) A-5, p. 459; A-6, p. 693; (15) A-5, p. 462.

Many bunkers and pillboxes with walls of reinforced concrete ranging from five to fifteen feet in thickness studded the key terrain features in the zone of the Seventh Army. In the Hardt Mountains, a network of trenches often connected these fortifications, which were mutually supporting and usually protected by wire entanglements. The trench system was very extensive. In some places the series of trenches extended 300 to 400 yards in depth. The principal trenches would commence on the forward slope of a hill with succeeding trenches 35 to 100 yards apart paralleling each other across the hill top to the reverse slope. Communication trenches connected the series of parallel trenches. Between the trenches barbed wire entanglements were often found and much of the timber had been felled, which added to the defensive quality of the obstacle.

The defenses of the Siegfried Line across the Rhine Valley were more elaborate. In addition to the pillbox and trench system, anti-tank ditches traversed the open areas. These ditches were backed up with "dragons teeth", which consisted of a belt of concrete pilings approximately 50 yards wide. These obstacles were designed to stop any armored vehicle and were within range of enemy anti-tank weapons. The defenses of the Siegfried extended several miles in depth, and had been prepared over a period of years to stop an invasion from Alsace. (16) (See Map C)

The Seventh Army plan for the attack into the Siegfried

(16) A-8, p. 53-54; Personal knowledge.

Line called for a two-corps front. The XV Corps on the west of the Lower Vosges or Hardt Mountains, was to make the main effort. The VI Corps on the east of the Hardt Mountains was given an additional mission of protecting the army right flank and holding the Rhine River at Strasbourg. The objective of each corps conformed to the Army objective within its zone. (17) (See Map C)

At 0001, 5 December, the VI Corps launched its attack with two divisions abreast, 45th Infantry Division on the left, 79th Infantry Division on the right. The 103d Infantry and the 14th Armored Divisions were in corps reserve. The mission of holding the Rhine River at Strasbourg was given to the 3d Division, thus relieving the French 2d Armored Division, which reverted to the control of the French First Army. (18)

The advance progressed rapidly toward the German border. As resistance increased, the 103d Infantry and the 14th Armored Divisions were committed on 7 December and 13 December, respectively, between the 45th and 79th Divisions. (19)
(See Map C)

On 16 December 1944, the VI Corps crossed the German frontier and pushed up against the outer defenses of the Siegfried Line with four divisions abreast on a 14-mile front. (20) (See Map C)

The 103d Division crossed the German border just west of Wissembourg on 16 December 1944, with two regiments abreast.

(17) A-5, p. 456; (18) A-5, p. 458; (19) A-5, p. 463,473;
(20) A-5, p. 477.

OK
The 409th Infantry on the right and the 411th Infantry on the left. The division objective was the high ground just north of Berg-Zabern. (21) (See Map D)

Elements of the German 245th Infantry Division and 21st Panzer Division had fought delaying actions in the path of the 103d Division in its advance from the Zintzel River. Now, elements of these same enemy divisions opposed the 103d Division from positions in the Siegfried Line. (22) (See Map D)

The plan of the 103d Division was to continue the attack on 17 December and capture the high ground north of Berg-Zabern. The 409th and 411th Infantry Regiments were to continue the attack abreast with the 409th on the right. The 410th Infantry was to remain in reserve. Since it would be difficult to maintain contact with the 14th Armored Division on the right, the 409th Infantry was given the additional mission of protecting the 103d Division's right flank. (23) (See Map D)

On 17 December the 409th Infantry was disposed on a 4,500-yard front in the hilly country north of Wissembourg and west of Rechtenbach. (See Map D) However, before the attack could be launched, orders were received postponing the operation until 18 December. (24)

The regimental attack plan for 18 December was for the 2d Battalion (on the right) to capture Grassberg and Hohenberg Hills and continue the attack on order. The 1st Battalion

(21) A-5, p. 473, 476; (22) A-5, p. 462, 476; (23) A-5, p. 476; A-9, p. 74, 75; A-8, p. 54; (24) A-12; A-9, p. 75; Personal knowledge.

Not on map D!

(on the left) was to seize Hill 489 and continue the attack on order. The 3d Battalion had been assigned the mission of protecting the regiment's right flank from positions overlooking Ober-Otterbach. (See Map D) A battalion of the 410th Infantry had been attached to the regiment on 17 December and constituted the reserve. (25)

THE BATTALION SITUATION

During the night of 16 December the 2d Battalion, 409th Infantry, dug in on what was thought to be Hill 412 and posted local security on the perimeter. The enemy harrassed the position with artillery fire throughout the night. Early on the morning of the 17th, it was discovered that the battalion was not on Hill 412, but was on Pitz Berg Hill one terrain feature in rear of it. This being the case, the Battalion Commander, Major Luis K. Hennighausen, Jr., ordered the battalion to move to Hill 412. This was accomplished without opposition. The unit began digging in at about 0730 hours with Company G on the left, Company F on the right and Company E in reserve. There was one heavy machine gun platoon from Company H with each of the front line rifle companies. The 81 mm mortar platoon went in position about 400 yards to the rear just off the trail that ran east-west at the foot of Hill 412. (See Map E)

Major Hennighausen arrived at the battalion OP about 0715 hours and stated that the battalion would continue the attack in its zone to the next line of hills as soon as con-

(25) A-12.

tact was established with the 1st Battalion on the left. (26)
(The battalion zone was approximately 2,500 yards wide).
Before this was accomplished, orders from regiment were received to hold up the attack. The reason given was that the regiment was too far in advance of the other elements of the Seventh Army. Vigorous patrolling was ordered for the remainder of the day. (27)

At 0900 hours three reconnaissance patrols were sent out, one from each of the rifle companies. Fox Patrol was to reconnoiter for covered routes across the valley below and up Hohenberg Hill and get as much information as possible relative to the disposition and strength of the enemy. George Patrol was to accomplish the same on Grassberg Hill. Easy Patrol was to reconnoiter the gap between Grassberg Hill and the hill immediately to the west, since it was a possible avenue of approach into the battalion position. (28)

Both machine gun platoons of Company H moved to positions where they could cover these patrols. George and Fox Patrols could be covered until they were atop of the ridge across the valley. Easy Patrol could be covered until it disappeared around the west nose of Grassberg.

The 81 mm mortar platoon had established two observation posts on Hill 412 and had registered two sections of mortars (4 guns) on Grassberg and Hohenberg. (See Map E) It was to be prepared to cover the withdrawal of these patrols on call. (29)

Fox Patrol advanced into the woods across the valley

(27) A-9, p. 75; Personal knowledge; (28) (29) Personal knowledge.

and up the slope of Hohenberg until it was approximately 250 yards from the top, where it was fired on by enemy riflemen from bunkers along the crest of the hill. The patrol withdrew and worked its way up the hill again some 400 yards further to the east. It selected a position about 400 yards from the crest to observe the hill. Several pillboxes and wire entanglements were located from the position, but no enemy were observed. (See Map E) The patrol returned at 1215 hours and reported that it had been fired on and gave the location of the pillboxes and wire. (30)

George Patrol moved directly down the forward slope of Hill 412, worked its way across the valley, and advanced straight up the forward slope of Grassberg. The patrol could be observed from Hill 412 all the way. The route followed by the patrol up the face of Grassberg appeared (to an observer on Hill 412) to be void of cover and concealment. The patrol arrived at a point about 250 yards from the crest from which it observed the area to the front, flanks, and rear. (See Map E) It returned to the Battalion Observation Post about 1300 hours and reported that it had observed no enemy, but smoke was seen emitting from three pillboxes. These boxes were well camouflaged and connected by trenches. There was wire between the patrol and the first trench, but it appeared to be very old and in a poor state of repair. The patrol leader estimated that a platoon could advance to the wire unobserved from any of the pillboxes. Also, the open route up the bald face of the hill was the only approach to Grassberg

(30) Personal knowledge.

that could not be observed by the enemy from these same boxes.
(31)

Easy Patrol returned at about 1430 hours and reported that no enemy was present on the western slope of Grassberg. The area between the two hills could not be used by tanks, but it was an excellent position for the enemy to launch a counterattack on the battalion's left flank. (32)

Regiment ordered a coordinated attack for 1110 hours, 18 December to capture phase line "J". (Phase Line "J" was Grassberg-Hohenberg Hills in 2d Battalion zone). The phase line objective was not to be crossed, except, on order. The formation was to remain the same. The 3d Battalion which had been in reserve, was to occupy positions on the extreme right to protect the regiment's right flank. (See Map E) This was ordered on the 17th after elements of the 14th Armored Division had been driven from Ober-Otterbach, leaving the regiment's right flank exposed. Communications were to be maintained at all cost. The 1st Battalion, 410th Infantry, (previously attached to the 409th Infantry), would remain attached and in regimental reserve. (33)

This attack was to be coordinated with the 411th Infantry, which was on the 409th's left, and had reached the outer defenses of the Siegfried north of Bobenthal. (34)
(See Map D)

THE BATTALION PLAN OF ATTACK

The 2nd Battalion's plan was to attack with two com-

(31) (32) Personal knowledge; (33) A-12; A-9, p. 75; Personal knowledge; (34) A-5, p. 476; Personal knowledge.

panies abreast, Company G on the left, was to seize Grassberg Hill; Company E on the right, was to pass through Company F and seize Hohenberg Hill. Company F, in reserve, was to move to a position between Grassberg and Hohenberg about 200 yards from the trail running east-west along the valley to the front, on order, and be prepared to attack to the east in case of a counterattack from that direction. Company H was to support the attack initially with both machine gun platoons from present positions on Hill 412. The 1st Machine Gun Platoon was to fire in support of Company E, and the 2nd Platoon in support of Company G. Displacement would be on order. From it's present position, the 81 mm mortar platoon was to be prepared to fire in support of the attack on call. (See Map E) The 382nd Field Artillery Battalion was in direct support of the regiment with priority of fires to the 2nd Battalion.

All fires were to be on call. No preparatory fires were to be fired. This was done for two reasons; first, to conserve ammunition since a shortage existed and since it was difficult to haul mortar ammunition into front line positions. Second, it was hoped that surprise would be gained by not firing supporting weapons until contact was made with the enemy. The line of departure was the line presently held. The time of attack, 1110 hours, 18 December 1944. (35)

The battalion command post, aid station and ammunition supply point were located in buildings in the western edge of Rechtenbach. (36) (See Map E)

(35) Personal knowledge; (36) A-12; Personal knowledge.

The Ammunition and Pioneer Platoon was to improve the trail from Rechtenbach west to the rear of the battalion position for jeep travel. The battalion command group was to remain at the Observation Post on Hill 412. (37)

During the remainder of the day, extra ammunition was issued and the men briefed as to how the forthcoming attack would be effected. The 81 mm mortar platoon vehicles were busy hauling extra ammunition into the supply point in Rechtenbach. As soon as work on the trail was completed, they could haul this ammunition into the mortar platoon position area. The principle types desired were "HE", light and white phosphorus. (38) There was a shortage of "HE", light at the time, so "HE", heavy (39) was taken in lieu thereof. The machine gun platoon placed six extra chests per gun on position. (40)

By 2100 the work on the trail into Rechtenbach was completed and rolls and "K" rations were delivered to a point in rear of the position where a foot path from Hill 412 intersected this trail. (See Map E) Carrying parties from each company were sent to this forward supply point for their respective rations and sleeping bags. No hot meals were fed due to the fact that kitchens were too far to the rear. Mortar platoon vehicles hauled all available mortar ammunition to the position area of the guns prior to midnight.

Enemy mortar and artillery fire pounded Hill 412 in-

(37) Personal knowledge; (38) "HE" light is High Explosive; light round; 81 mm mortar ammunition; (39) "High Explosive", heavy round, 81 mm mortar ammunition; (40) Personal knowledge.

termittently throughout 17 December and continued to harrass the position throughout the night of the same date. The men were well dug in and very few casualties resulted. (41)

THE ATTACK ON GRASSBERG AND HOHENBERG HILLS

Dawn came on 18 December with a fine mist of rain and a light ground fog, which made the rugged hills across the narrow valley barely distinguishable. Activity on Hill 412 was kept to a minimum and men were required to remain in their fox holes and on the alert. Three or four rounds of "Jerry" mortar or artillery fire continued to come in every ten to fifteen minutes. (42)

At 0630 hours, Major Hennighausen decided that he would like to know more about the western nose of Grassberg. If it was still unoccupied by the enemy, he was considering changing the plan of attack to hit Grassberg from that direction. He directed the Battalion S-2 to get a patrol out as soon as possible and to send a couple of men from the Intelligence and Reconnaissance Section along and for them to be back by no later than 1000 hours. This patrol, consisting of six men, departed on its mission at 0710 hours. (43)

By 0900 hours the fog had lifted, but the rain continued. The objective appeared to the casual observer as any other rugged hill. Upon closer inspection, however, unnatural mounds of various sizes covered with vegetation were seen. Some had small trees six to ten feet tall growing on them.

(41) (42) (43) Personal knowledge.

These mounds were pillboxes, among which were the first built in the Siegfried Line. Nature had done a superior job of camouflage. Fallen trees could be seen, but the vegetation concealed the wire entanglements and trenches. (44)

At 0920 hours a lone enemy soldier was observed running along the crest of Grassberg toward the western nose. This was the only enemy actually seen since the battalion arrived on Hill 412. (45)

Last minute preparations were being made for the attack. The Company Commander of Company H checked the machine gun platoons' position areas and sectors of fire. He made sure that each platoon understood that fires were to be on call. The mortar platoon was checked to insure that range cards were prepared and that mortar concentrations were plotted on all maps, particularly, those of the rifle company commanders. The two mortar observation posts on Hill 412 were checked to insure that they were wired in. He checked to see that a mortar observer was with each of the assault rifle companies. The battalion had previously drawn three extra SCR 300 radios to be used in the mortar platoon of the heavy weapons company. One was issued to each of the observers with the assault rifle companies and the other was issued to the platoon leader. However, one was in repair leaving the observer with Company E to rely on wire for communications. (CE-11 Sound power equipment) (46)

The mortar platoon was to use two sections of mortars

(44) A-8, p. 53-54; Personal knowledge; (45) Personal knowledge; (46) Personal knowledge.

in battery. The reason for not employing the third section of mortars was that four guns could fire all the ammunition that company transportation could haul. (47)

At 1045 hours regiment directed that the attack be held up until 1145 hours. The left company of the 1st Battalion had been worked over by enemy mortar and artillery fire. Too, a patrol from the right company was still out. (48)

The patrol sent out at 0710 hours returned to the battalion observation post at 1140 hours with information that it had seen no enemy activity and that the western slope of Grassberg was unoccupied by the enemy. (49)

Due to the hour and the fact that a German soldier was observed moving toward the western slope of Grassberg earlier in the morning, Major Hennighausen, ordered the attack to be executed as originally planned. (50)

At 1145 hours, 18 December, Companies G and E moved out. They moved down the steep forward slope of Hill 412, generally abreast taking advantage of the concealment afforded by the vegetation and crossed the valley below without opposition. (51)

Company E, commanded by Captain John Stevenson, entered the woods and advanced up the steep slopes of Hohenberg until it was about 350 yards from the crest where it was fired on by machine guns from pillboxes about 75 yards up the hill. (See Map F) At about the same time a terrific mortar concentration was laid on Company E. (52)

(47) Personal knowledge; (48) A-9, p. 76; Personal knowledge; (49) (50) Personal knowledge; (51) A-9, p. 76; Personal knowledge; (52) Personal knowledge.

In the meantime Company G, commanded by Captain Roger H. Craddock, worked its way up the bald open face of Grassberg in column of platoons. It passed several unmanned bunkers on the way up and had arrived almost to the wire entanglement in front of the first line of trenches when Company E made contact with the enemy. At about the same time, "Jerry" threw an artillery concentration, mostly time fire, into the draw on Company G's immediate right. The company was not caught in any of this fire. G Company's third platoon continued to advance, working their way through the wire entanglements, where they were fired on by a machine gun from a pillbox some fifty yards to their left front; forcing them to take cover. In no time at all the entire hillside appeared to erupt. A very accurate mortar barrage was falling on Company G. Rifle and machine gun fire from the second line of trenches about a hundred yards further up the hill was causing the platoon in the barbed wire a lot of trouble. (53)

(See Map F)

The 81 mm mortar observer with Company G called for the concentration plotted for Grassberg to be fired, giving the range as 200 yards short. Two rounds were fired, one from each gun of Number 1 Section. The observer's command came back; "up one turn, fire for effect". (This shortened the range) The section fired a 20 round concentration, which temporarily eliminated the fire from the trenches. (54)

A rifle grenadier, in the meantime, had been firing at

(53) (54) Personal knowledge.

the embrasure of the pillbox to the left front. The gun had been keeping up a steady chatter since it first opened up, and now it had ceased. The small arms fire from the front had reduced to a few scattered shots, but the mortars were still covering the hillside. The 3rd Platoon of G Company took advantage of the lull and made a rush for the first trench. The trench was gained with some difficulty, for the wire entanglement had to be negotiated some 20 yards to reach it. Once in the trench, the platoon quickly fanned out to the right and left. A hand grenade was tossed into the pillbox, which had caused the platoon its first trouble, but no enemy were present. There was a "Jerry" machine gun in the embrasure, which had jammed, but the occupants had escaped through the maze of connecting trenches to the rear.

(55)

As the men of Company G were assaulting the first trench, enemy movement was picked up on the western nose of Grassberg. Close observation revealed it to be enemy infantry moving into the trenches immediately on G Company's left flank. (56)

The Company Commander of H Company seeing this movement, ran from his observation post to the position area of the 2d Machine Gun Platoon, pointed out the target to Lieutenant Thomas F. Crusinberry, its platoon leader. In a matter of seconds the four guns of the platoon were on the target and searching the area. The company commander then returned to his observation post, which was approximately 50 yards to the

(55) (56) Personal knowledge.

right of the platoon's position area, and contacted the mortar observer on the left of Hill 412 by sound power telephone and directed that mortar fire be put on the area being worked over by the machine guns. A 25 round concentration of "HE" and white phosphorus was adjusted on the target. No further enemy movement was observed from that position. (57)

About five minutes elapsed when "Jerry" hit the position area of Crusinberry's platoon with artillery. There was no hesitation in moving to its alternate position, which was about a 100 yards further to the left and some 50 yards further to the rear. (See Map F) No casualties resulted to the machine gun platoon from this action. (58)

The enemy fired artillery into this area every ten to fifteen minutes for the remainder of the day just in case something was left there. These fires made the H Company Observation Post a very unhealthy spot; resulting in moving it to an alternate location. (59)

By 1420 hours Company E had captured three large pillboxes and had fought its way through the enemy trenches to within 150 yards of the crest of Hohenberg. (See Map F) Here the enemy was giving his undivided attention to that company. Artillery and mortar fire was falling all over the south slope of Hohenberg. Enemy machine guns and rifles were firing from position very close in front of E Company. (60)

American artillery was doing no mean job of working over both hills. Artillery could be adjusted to a fair degree in

(57) (58) (59) (60) Personal knowledge.

E Company's sector, but the observation wasn't as good on Grassberg. The terrain made a difference, too. In order to adjust artillery fire to where it was most needed a percentage of rounds always fell in G Company's position. During the afternoon a 155-mm shell hit G Company's command post, killing two men and wounding three others. (61)

By mid-afternoon most of Company G had succeeded in gaining the cover of the first line of enemy trenches. Captain Roger H. Craddock, its company commander, notified the heavy weapons company commander by SCR-300 radio that he was in a position where he could now use machine guns. (62)

The company commander of H Company, contacted Lieutenant Stanley B. Dickson, leader of the 1st Machine Gun Platoon, and told him to displace to Grassberg in support of Company G. The platoon made its way up the steep hillside and established contact with G Company's support platoon at about 1630 hours. (See Map F) At this time "Jerry" was again contesting the activities on Grassberg with accurate mortar fire. (63)

Lieutenant Dickson succeeded in working his platoon through the wire and into the trench that was held by Company G, without suffering any casualties. This was accomplished by sending one man through the wire at a time. Once in the trench, the two machine gun sections were placed along the trench where they could get the best fields of fire. (See Map F) At best, 50 yards was the maximum range the observation and terrain would allow. (64)

(61) (62) (63) (64) Personal knowledge.

Shortly, after Lieutenant Dickson's machine gun platoon displaced from Hill 412, Major Hennighausen, ordered F Company to move to the area previously designated between Grassberg and Hohenberg. 1st Lieutenant Thomas F. White, Company Commander of F Company was told to be on the alert for a counterattack from the right of Hohenberg. The 2d Machine Gun Platoon from its position on Hill 412 was given the mission of covering this move. (65)

Lieutenant White and his company moved out without delay and as they were crossing the trail in the valley below, rifle and machine gun fire opened up from Hohenberg about 400 yards to E Company's right. It could not be determined at whom this fire was directed. F Company apparently was not affected as they continued to advance. Lieutenant Crusinberry wasted no time in getting his machine guns on this new target. As soon as the 2d Machine Gun Platoon opened fire, the firing ceased from the enemy's position. (66)

At 1650 hours Major Hennighausen arrived at the H Company Observation Post and directed that the 2d Machine Gun Platoon be displaced to the area occupied by Company F and be prepared to fire to the right and to the left from F Company's position in case of a counterattack from west of Grassberg or from the east of Hohenberg. (See Map F) A runner was dispatched to the 2d Machine Gun Platoon and by 1715 hours Lieutenant Crusinberry reported that he had completed the move without incident. (67)

(65) (66) (67) Personal knowledge.

Throughout the afternoon H Company mortars were firing missions almost continually. G Company had complained that a mission called for was not fired because at the time only one section of guns was in and it was firing a mission for E Company. Upon investigation, it was found that the mortars dug themselves into the soft ground and had to be moved after approximately every 50 rounds fired. Before these guns could be put in position again, the base plates had to be dug out. This process was continuous and resulted in only one section of mortars being in firing position at any one time. (68)

After learning of this condition, the company commander of Company H, directed Lieutenant William H. Adair, the platoon leader, to use the base plates of the third section, which were on carrier, while they were digging out those that were buried. This worked well and insured that both sections of guns were in at all times, except, for the few seconds required to move the mortar tube and bipod to their alternate base plate and set them up. (69)

German mortar fire searched the rear area of Hill 412, almost hourly during the afternoon. Apparently, the enemy had an idea that the 81-mm mortars were somewhere behind Hill 412. They were always over or short and, therefore, no damage resulted, except, for the harrassing effect they had on the mortar crews. The 3d Platoon had emplaced their mortars very close to the base of Hill 412 in an open area behind a group of very tall trees. Rounds that would have normally landed

(68) (69) Personal knowledge.

in the mortar position area hit the trees first. (70)

Shortly after nightfall G Company succeeded in getting all of its men in the trenches, which were by no means cleared of the enemy. The second line of trenches was about 35 yards to the front and was connected with the first by several communication trenches. Between these trenches were felled trees and barbed wire. Clearing them of the enemy was a slow process, which involved grenading each section of the trench, then occupying it before the enemy. (71)

At 2030 hours most of Company G had occupied the second line of trenches and captured another large pillbox. By this time the battle of Grassberg and Hohenberg had developed into a hand grenade throwing contest. Hand to hand fighting occurred several times when the men suddenly came face to face with German soldiers in the close confines of the enemy trenches. Apparently, the enemy did not know exactly where G Company's men were at all times, for there were several examples of where the Germans were surprised in these trenches, as evidenced by their attempts to beat a hasty retreat upon contact. (72)

At about 2100 hours considerable movement could be heard to G Company's left front. This movement was close in and it could not be determined in the noise of battle whether it was reinforcements coming in or a counterattack. All four machine guns of the 1st Machine Gun Platoon opened up employing "swinging traverse". (73) (Accomplished by loosening the traversing clamp, letting the gun swing free laterally).

(70) (71) (72) (73) Personal knowledge.

Screams could be heard coming from the direction of movement. Mortar fire was called for again since it could be gotten quicker and artillery could not effectively cover the target without endangering friendly troops. One section of mortars put a 30-round concentration of this target, after which no further movement was heard from that area. The grenade throwing contest continued with rifle and machine gun fire as before. (74)

Company E during the day had captured four pillboxes and had taken the trenches some 50 yards from the top of Hohenberg. (See Map F) This put E Company's front line about 100 yards in advance of G Company. (75)

At 2300 hours Captain Stevenson decided he was too far forward for comfort and therefore, pulled his company back on line with Company G and set up a perimeter defense in the trenches. He then reported to the battalion commander what he had done and recommended that he be permitted to remain where he was. Major Hennighausen, accepted Captain Stevenson's recommendations and approved his actions. (76)

Casualties were high during the afternoon and night and few could be evacuated due to the concentrations of mortar and artillery fire, which swept the hillsides. The litter haul was about 900 yards and over rough terrain requiring six men to carry one litter case out. Therefore, a forward aid station was established in the first pillbox captured by G Company and manned by the medical administrative corps

(74) (75) (76) Personal knowledge.

Lieutenant, and two assistants. (See Map F) This greatly facilitated the care of the wounded until they could be evacuated. (77)

G Company's position on Grassberg during the night of 18 December was the shape of a horseshoe. At the toe was the first pillbox where the company command post and the forward aid station were established. At the heel of the shoe on the left was the last pillbox that was taken. About 40 yards to the front was the last pillbox located on Grassberg. The two sections of heavy machine guns of Dickson's platoon were emplaced one section on each side of the shoe to close the heel with cross fire. Two men from each squad were to man each gun, while the remainder, took their places to the right and left of its position to provide protection for it as well as to fill spaces in the line along the trench. (See Map F)

The hand grenades used by the Germans were percussion type, round, and a little smaller than a baseball. Their casualty effect was not very great, but they did have quite an effect on morale. They were nasty because often times what would have been a miss with a conventional type grenade was a hit with this type. They would hit short of the trenches and continue to roll down hill into the trenches. (78)

There was no sleeping for anyone on Grassberg and Hohenberg Hills during the night of 18 December. Firing would almost cease, then all "Hell would break loose" again. This

(77) (78) Personal knowledge.

continued all night long. Leaders moved along the trenches to insure that adequate personnel were alert. They were all tired, for the battalion had been on the move for the past nine days. The slow drizzle of rain continued. (79)

By 0100 hours company guides had picked up their respective supply details of pack mules loaded with "K" rations, mail, water and ammunition and gone forward with them. (A detail of 30 mules and 14 men from the 513th Quartermaster Pack Company was attached to the battalion during the day). Prior to daylight "shape" and "pole" charges would be delivered to front line companies for use against pillboxes and bunkers during the next day's attack. (80)

Radio was the primary means of communications during 18 December. Wire parties were on the lines continuously and could not keep them in. H Company's mortar observer with Company E adjusted fire through the company commander of E Company, who relayed fire commands by SCR 300 radio to the heavy weapons company commander, who in turn, relayed them to one of the observers on Hill 412, or to Lieutenant Adair, 81-mm mortar platoon leader, who relayed them to the guns. This procedure was complicated, but it did work. (81)

THE SECOND DAY OF THE ATTACK - 19 DECEMBER 1944

The attack was ordered to be continued at 0700 hours, 19 December subsequent to a five minute artillery preparation. The objective was the same as for 18 December. (82)

(79) Personal knowledge; (80) A-12; Personal knowledge; (81) Personal knowledge; (82) A-9, p. 76; Personal knowledge.

At 0655 hours the artillery commenced its preparation. Again a few rounds fell into G Company's area. The concentration lifted at 0700 hours and the attack was on. Mortar and artillery fire pounded G Company's position as they moved forward through the network of trenches. (See Map F) The advance of Company G was measured in feet for "Jerry" contested every move with everything he had. (83)

At 0800 hours the enemy mortar and artillery fire increased. In five minute's time very little of Grassberg and Hohenberg Hills could be seen from Hill 412 for the smoke that resulted from the shelling. These fires were so intense and sustained that little doubt existed as to what was coming next. Experience had taught that this was a sure sign of a counterattack. The artillery and mortar fire lifted at 0820 hours and the counterattack followed as was expected. (84)

The Germans counterattacked from the left front of Company G with an estimated 70 or 80 men. (See Map F) This attack was heavier than was expected and was supported by tanks. The tanks came as a surprise, but their effectiveness was impeded by the nature of the terrain. (85)

H Company's mortar observer with Company G called for the concentration plotted for the top of Grassberg. Captain Craddock was with the H Company observer at this time and was in contact with the heavy weapons company commander. He requested all the mortar fire he could get, and stated that the Germans were too close to his position to put artillery

(83) (84) (85) Personal knowledge.

on them. Artillery was placed in the area where the tanks could be heard. (86)

The first 81-mm mortar concentration fired was 60 rounds of "HE" light. No sooner had this concentration been fired, than it was called for again. This time Captain Craddock told the observer to pull the concentration into the company position, if necessary. Both sections of guns were fired, doubling the concentration, which was pulled within 25 yards of G Company's most forward position. The counterattack was broken up at that point. (See Map F) As the enemy withdrew, he was pursued by mortar and artillery fire searching the area northwest of Grassberg, in which he was last seen. (87)

Lieutenant Dickson's heavy machine guns could not be employed to fire into the counterattack initially due to the nature of the terrain. When the enemy had advanced to within 50 yards of the position, the platoon opened fire using the rapid rate. (250 rounds per gun per minute). This volume of fire at close range assisted materially in stopping the counterattack. (See Map F) One heavy machine gun was knocked out when an enemy rifle bullet pierced the water jacket of the gun and wounded the gunner. Lieutenant Dickson notified his company commander that the gun would be needed in the event of another counterattack. (88)

The 2d Platoon, which was in F Company's area, was told to take one of their guns to the 1st Platoon as soon as possible and exchange it for the damaged gun. This was a rather

(86) (87) (88) Personal knowledge.

hazardous undertaking under the circumstances, but in less than an hour Dickson had four guns ready to go. (89)

The battalion S-4 was contacted through the battalion observation post, told to pick up another gun as soon as possible, and that the damaged gun would be evacuated as soon as the situation permitted. (90)

Company E had been getting its share of mortar and artillery fire during the counterattack, but very little small arms fire. Captain Stevenson was regulating his advance on Company G, which had been able to advance only about 20 yards. (See Map F) E Company's opposition was light to the extent that they were having little difficulty as they moved forward. Apparently the activity on Grassberg had attracted the enemy's attention from Hohenberg. (91)

Mortar fire continued to fall on both company positions. Very little of this fire had found its way into F Company's area. The accuracy with which these mortar concentrations were placed on Company G was uncanny. (92)

At about 0940 hours, one of G Company's men noticed a protrusion on top of the large pillbox to the front. At first he thought it was a ventilator. (See Map) It had attracted his attention when he thought he saw it move. Close observation revealed it to be a periscope. It was knocked out by rifle fire, after which, the enemy's mortar and artillery concentrations were quite general and not concentrated on any particular move that Company G made as was

(89) (90) (91) (92) Personal knowledge.

the case before. (93)

By 1000 hours Captain Craddock had completed his plan to take the big pillbox to his immediate front. He submitted the plan by telephone to Major Hennighausen who was at the battalion observation post on Hill 412 and it was approved. (94)

Captain Craddock's plan was to clear the trench area forward to a point where at least a section of heavy machine guns could cover a demolition detail, which was to crawl forward under these covering fires and blow the box. As it developed, all four guns of Dickson's platoon were used for this job. (95)

At 1200 hours three volunteers from Company G led by Technical Sergeant Springborn, snaked a perilous path toward the pillbox, under the covering fires of Lieutenant Dickson's guns. (See Map F) The machine guns were firing a little high, too high to do much damage to the enemy, but the fire did succeed in keeping the Germans heads down. Sergeant Springborn placed the 40 pound "pole charge" in the embrasure and crawled back some 15 to 20 yards before it blew. As the dust cleared 16 Germans came out with their hands up. They were pretty well shaken up, but were otherwise unharmed. One of the prisoners was a lieutenant, forward observer, who had been directing the mortar and artillery fire on Grassberg. (96)

The machine gun platoon continued to fire high as G Com-

(93) (94) (95) Personal knowledge; (96) A-8, p. 54; Personal knowledge.

pany's, 3d Platoon, following generally the path of Sergeant Springborn, pushed two squads into the next line of trenches, which connected the large box just taken with several small bunkers. (See Map F) By 1400 hours the forward trench had been cleared of the enemy and the mopping up of the communication trenches between was underway. (97)

In the meantime E Company was moving forward to occupy the trenches it had abandoned the day before. Captain Stevenson, his executive officer, a platoon leader, and three men moved forward to a large pillbox, which had been selected as the company command post. As they entered the box, a German soldier, who was inside, quickly stepped outside and slammed the door shut, locking them in the box. At about the same time "Jerry" hit the advance elements of E Company with machine gun and rifle fire from the trenches they had abandoned the night before. (See Map F) A squad of Company E attempted to work its way to the pillbox to liberate Captain Stevenson and his party. The enemy had emplaced a machine gun beside the box and apparently had ideas about staying there. After several attempts to reach the box had failed, E Company consolidated its position under command of the 1st Sergeant. The three officers assigned to the company were prisoners in the pillbox to the front. (98)

The forward companies advanced no further during the remainder of 19 December. Prior to nightfall, positions were consolidated to hold the ground gained. Considerable mortar

(97) Personal knowledge; (98) A-8, p. 54; A-9, p. 77; Personal knowledge.

and artillery fire continued to fall, but none of it caused the battalion much concern. It no longer had the deadly accuracy it had before. (99)

Lieutenant Dickson's machine gun platoon took its place in the trenches with the riflemen of Company G and prepared defensive fires for the night. (100)

Ammunition of all types was low by early evening, 19 December. In addition to the pack mules, which could not be moved forward of Hill 412 during daylight hours, a carrying party consisting of drivers, clerks and cooks was formed to carry ammunition, rations, mail and water to Companies G and E and the 1st Machine Gun Platoon with Company G. This was done so that these men, who had been fighting for 10 days straight running, would be spared as much as possible. The replacement machine gun was included in the items brought up by the carrying party. (101)

The night of 19 December passed with less activity than the previous night. The hand grenade duel continued as before, but the artillery and mortar fire was very scattered and was a source of little concern as compared to the previous night. (102)

From his observation post on Hill 412, at about 2230 hours, 19 December, Major Hennighausen issued the order by telephone to continue the attack at 0730 hours, on 20 December. The plan was the same except that supporting fires would be on call. Limited attacks would be made to improve positions

(99) (100) Personal knowledge; (101) A-12; Personal Knowledge; (102) Personal knowledge.

and no major gains were to be attempted. (103)

THE THIRD DAY OF THE ATTACK - 20 DECEMBER 1944

Dawn on 20 December brought a little snow with the fine mist of rain which continued to fall. All this added more discomfort to the men, who were forced to confine themselves to their assigned posts in the trenches on Grassberg and Hohenberg Hills. (104)

The mortar and artillery fire had ceased and all was quiet except for an occasional outburst from a German machine pistol. A few grenades exploded now and then which served as a reminder that the enemy was still in the next line of trenches some 40 yards to the front. (105)

As the front line companies, at 0730 hours, continued the process of clearing more communication trenches in order to strengthen their positions, Grassberg and Hohenberg suddenly came to life again.

Both Companies G and E had captured more trenches than they could adequately man. The Germans had moved through the network of trenches to the left of G Company and had occupied some of the trenches previously captured. The process of clearing the enemy from within the company position was underway at 0800 hours at which time Grassberg and Hohenberg were again pounded with artillery and mortar fire. As this fire continued the battalion got set for another counterattack. From the nature of the terrain and the enemy's actions the

(103) A-9, p. 77; Personal knowledge; (104) (105) Personal knowledge.

previous day, it was anticipated that if another counterattack materialized, it would come from the same general area that the first one had. (106)

The Germans hit G Company's position from the left front at 0820 hours as they had on 19 December. (See Map F) In order for them to enter the company position, they would have to do so through the trenches, since the obstacles between each line of trenches, would have to be dealt with. (107)

The 81-mm mortar observer with Company G had been unable to establish communication. Therefore, Captain Craddock called for the close in concentration, fired the day before, to be fired at this time. He called for this fire through the battalion S-3 and requested that it be continued until the counterattack was stopped. Six 81-mm mortar concentrations of 60 rounds each were fired into the counterattack. Captain Craddock finally pulled this concentration in so close that several rounds fell in the company position before the Germans were stopped. No casualties occurred as a result of the 81-mm mortar fire that fell in G Company's area. Tanks could be heard behind the crest of the hill, but did not show themselves during the counterattack. (108)

The 1st Machine Gun Platoon from its position opened fire as the Germans came into view over the crest of the hill. (See Map F) Visibility was very poor at this time and due to the nature of the terrain final protective lines could not be established. Each gun section fired within its sector of

(106) (107) (108) Personal knowledge.

fire in the direction of the counterattack. Results of the fire could not be observed. Due to the change in temperature, smoke from the guns seemed to be greater and hung in the vicinity of the position for sometime after the firing. This resulted in the enemy locating each gun position and therefore rendering these positions virtually untenable. Gun crews were forced to take cover in the trenches during these brief but intense periods of fire. Alternate positions for the guns amounted to shifting each position laterally along the trench. It would have been suicide to place a machine gun forward along one of the connecting trenches and they could not fire at all, if placed in any of the trenches in rear of the front line rifle platoons. (109)

E Company was making preparations to continue the attack to recapture the trenches they had abandoned on the night of 18 December and liberate its company commander, the two officers and three enlisted men with him, who were in the pillbox to the front. (110)

The 81-mm mortar platoon had planned a five minute preparation on the enemy positions around the pillbox. This appeared to be where the enemy was strongest immediately in front of Company E. At 0835 hours, the preparation commenced. When it lifted five minutes later, one platoon of Company E led by the company 1st Sergeant had worked its way forward through the connecting trenches and assaulted the main enemy trench connecting the pillbox and several bunkers.

(109) (110) Personal knowledge.

A short fire fight ensued as the platoon fanned out to the right and left to secure the trench. (111)

The mortar observer with Company E shifted the mortar fire to the next line of trenches which were some 60 yards farther up the hill. This fire kept the enemy entertained to a marked degree while E Company's right platoon made its way to the enemy trench now occupied by the left platoon of the company. (112)

At 0900 hours Captain Stevenson and his party were released from the pillbox and had suffered none the worse for their stay there. (113)

Twenty men from odds and ends around the battalion command post in Rechtenbach were formed into a detail to assist in evacuating the wounded from Grassberg and Hohenberg Hills. This detail arrived at the battalion observation post on Hill 412 about 1000 hours. Guides from Company F led the detail across the valley to the forward aid station on Grassberg Hill. The medical personnel manning the station had worked around the clock since arriving there on 18 December. (114)

Litter bearers that moved through the trenches evacuating the wounded appeared to have little regard for the enemy situation. No matter how rough the going was, they continued the tricky process of evacuating the wounded under fire. The litter haul from the position, across the small valley and up Hill 412 was under the eyes of the enemy. Mortar and artillery fire pounded these reaches incessantly, which further

(111) (112) Personal knowledge; (113) A-12; Personal knowledge; (114) A-12; Personal knowledge.

*Company E
Platoon attacks*

complicated a litter haul that would have been rough enough under ideal conditions. Slowly all casualties were being evacuated. (115)

The forward companies continued to improve their positions for the remainder of the day under sporadic rifle and machine gun fire. The enemy mortars and artillery fired in areas throughout the battalion area, concentrating on no particular locality. Three of these concentrations fell in F Company's position with little damage. The men of the 2d Machine Gun Platoon, which was with Company F, had dug their guns in and covered the emplacement with logs. Supplementary positions to cover the valley to the west were prepared in the same manner. Individual foxholes were also logged in. Foxholes in F Company's primary position were prepared in the same way, this saved many men from becoming casualties from "tree bursts". (116)

Early in the afternoon of 20 December, twenty one reinforcements were received for the battalion. Seven of these men had been in combat and therefore were assigned to Companies E and G. The others were assigned to Company F, which would be better than placing them in front line companies initially. (117)

Lieutenant Adair, leader of the 81-mm mortar platoon, reported to his company commander, at the heavy weapons company observation post at 1500 hours. He had been told by his platoon sergeant that mortar ammunition was being rationed,

(115) (116) Personal knowledge; (117) A-12; Personal knowledge.

and that 400 rounds of all types were on position. 81-mm mortar ammunition could be drawn on the basis of six rounds per gun per day. (118)

The heavy weapons company commander talked this over with Major Hennighausen, who designated him to control the fire requested for the 81-mm mortars. This was an easy task, since the heavy weapons company commander was in communication with the mortar platoon leader with wire and radio. Emergency requests would be fired as before, but all others would receive approval by the company commander of Company H. Major Hennighausen was requested to ask for the daily rate of 81-mm mortar ammunition for the attached battalion of the 410th Infantry, which was in regimental reserve. This request was approved. However, the ammunition was equally divided among the three battalions of the 409th Infantry now in the line. (119)

At 1530 hours Company E beat off a counterattack, which was a half hearted attempt on the part of the enemy to regain the trench they had lost during the morning. During the counterattack it was necessary for the mortar observer to pull the 81-mm mortar concentration within 35 yards of the company position. Captain Stevenson complained to the battalion commander and requested that the H Company observer be relieved. This request was disapproved and the Lieutenant, observer, who was the section leader of one of the gun sections, remained with E Company throughout the action. (120)

(118) (119) (120) Personal knowledge.

Later during the day it was discovered that the enemy was infiltrating small groups into the trenches to the rear and sniping from bunkers that were unmanned by the front line companies. This harrassing continued until dusk when the support platoon of Companies E and G succeeded in clearing the enemy from these positions. After this was done, all bunkers and pillboxes not manned by the forward companies were destroyed with demolitions to prevent infiltrating groups of enemy from using them. (121)

After darkness on the night of 20 December, Company F relieved Company G on Grassberg Hill. (See Map G) Company G occupied the prepared position held by Company F since 18 December.

H Company's 2d Machine Gun Platoon went with Company F and relieved the 1st Machine Gun Platoon, which was with Company G. Arrangements were made between the two platoon leaders to exchange guns by leaving them emplaced. Machine Gun ammunition was left on position, except the 2d Platoon took extra ammunition forward as the relief was effected. (122)

Apparently the enemy became aware that something was going on for he became increasingly active. Before the relief was completed enemy mortar and artillery plastered both forward positions. 81-mm mortars and artillery concentrations were fired on enemy positions forward and to the left front of the company position on Grassberg. Casualties were negligible during the relief. The 2d Machine Gun Platoon lost one

(121) Personal knowledge; (122) A-12; Personal knowledge.

man wounded. (123)

Carrying parties went forward as they previously had done, except sleeping bags were carried to company positions. Those not required to move about in the trenches during the night, zipped the bags around themselves, and continued the long hours of the night standing. (124)

Artillery and mortar fire pounded Grassberg and Hohenberg throughout the night, supplemented with hand grenades being lobbed into the forward positions. Counterattacks were reported hitting the battalion positions to the right and left of the 2d Battalion.

The men on Hohenberg were less alert than previous nights making it necessary for leaders to work the trenches continually to keep them awake. Men would fall asleep standing or leaning against the sides of the trenches. Company F and the 2d Platoon, Company H, had little difficulty in this regard. Leaders were required to check through the trenches occupied by his troops, but found them to be alert. Being the first night they had spent so close to the enemy, they were very "jumpy", making somewhat of a precarious task for those inspecting platoon and squad positions during the hours of darkness. (125)

Major Hennighausen issued orders at 1130 hours to continue the action on 21 December by patrolling the forward positions. All weapons were to employ aggressive reconnaissance by fire, but no forward gains were to be attempted. (126)

(123) (124) (125) Personal knowledge; (126) A-9, p. 77; Personal knowledge.

THE FOURTH DAY OF THE ATTACK - 21 DECEMBER 1944

The morning of 21 December brought news of the Ardennes offensive, which had begun on 16 December. This bit of news did nothing to aid the morale of the 2d Battalion. It was now apparent why the outfit was going on the defensive. Apparently the enemy had heard this bit of news, too, for he increased his activities along the front of the battalion. Heavy mortar and artillery fire commenced to pound the positions prior to daylight and continued until 0820 hours, at which time the enemy launched his third counterattack from the northwest of Grassberg at the same hour of the day. (127)

Requests for mortar fire from Company F through the mortar observer from Company H was answered with a 150 round concentration of "HE" light and "HE" heavy mixed. Fire was pulled to within a few yards of the front line riflemen and continued in that locality until the enemy was stopped. Artillery worked over the area in rear of Grassberg. (128)

The 2d Machine Gun Platoon with Company F opened fire on the counterattacking Germans as soon as it was discovered that the attack was coming from the area northwest of Grassberg. (See Map G) Fields of fire were very short; 75 yards at the most. This short range decreased the effectiveness of the guns, but was of a great deal of assistance to the supported rifle company in beating off the attack. (129)

By 0900 hours the battalion front had quieted down considerably. Enemy mortars and artillery continued to harass (127) (128) (129) Personal knowledge.

the position, but the Germans in the trenches a short distance to the front were not so active.

To determine if the enemy was still in his close in position, all that was necessary was to raise a helmet above the trenches on a rifle. Usually the helmet was withdrawn with a bullet hole in it. (130)

Company E on Hohenberg had noted no change in the situation in its sector except, the enemy was less active as had been the case throughout the entire action. (131)

The company commander of Company H reported the status of 81-mm mortar ammunition to the battalion commander at 1100 hours. There was less than 200 rounds of all types on position and none on carrier. He expressed a deep concern as to the outcome of the next counterattack, if any of the ammunition was expended to fire targets other than in emergencies. Major Hennighausen allotted 50 rounds of "HE" heavy to be fired on routine targets and the remainder to be held in case of another counterattack. The meager amount of mortar ammunition allowed per day was a matter of much concern for the entire battalion. (132)

The enemy was reasonably quiet for the remainder of the day, which gave the battalion an opportunity to evacuate its dead, that is, the bodies that could be gotten out. The 1st Sergeant of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 2d Battalion was given a detail and six mules for the job. Front line companies evacuated their dead to a point in rear of G

(130) (131) (132) Personal knowledge.

Company's position, where they were picked up and evacuated to a designated point on the trail in rear of Hill 412. Here they could be picked up and hauled to the rear by "jeep". (133)

About sundown on 21 December, Major Noble L. Riggs, commanding officer, 2d Battalion, 179th Infantry, 45th Infantry Division arrived at the 2d Battalion observation post on Hill 412 with his company commanders, S-3 and S-2. This was the first news that the regiment was to be relieved. Each of the officers with Major Riggs spent the remainder of the night with his counterpart in the 2d Battalion, 409th Infantry working out the details of the relief. (134)

THE RELIEF OF THE 2D BATTALION - 22 DECEMBER 1944

Companies of Major Riggs' battalion arrived on Hill 412 at about 0030 hours, 22 December, at which time the relief of the 2d Battalion, 409th Infantry began. Officer guides met each company of the incoming battalion and guided it to the position area of the company to be relieved. (135)

Prior to daylight the entire relief of the 2d Battalion was completed. Shortly after daylight, Major Hennighausen turned over his observation post on Hill 412 to Major Riggs. Hohenberg and Grassberg Hills were now the responsibility of the 2d Battalion, 179th Infantry. (136)

During the early morning hours of 22 December the battalion marched to the town of Schweigen, Germany. There it received its first hot meal in twelve days. The men were

(133) Personal knowledge; (134) A-9, p. 79; Personal knowledge; (135) Personal knowledge; (136) A-12; Personal knowledge.

exhausted and fell asleep wherever they stopped. (137)

At 1300 hours a meeting of the company commanders and the battalion staff was held at the battalion command post. The regiment had a new mission. The move would commence at dark that was to take the division some 80 miles to the northwest in the area of the XV Corps. (138)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing and criticizing this operation the following is offered:

Personal
The zone of responsibility assigned the 2d Battalion for this operation was 2,500 yards wide, through very difficult terrain, which was heavily fortified. Therefore, it is my opinion that the zone was too much for a regiment, much less a battalion. *which caused - - -*

OK
The enemy could have caused the 2d Battalion more damage and possibly cut it off completely had he counterattacked through the gaps in the line between battalions instead of hitting at the positions we held.

By counterattacking at the same time of day from the same general area for three consecutive days, the enemy lost surprise and consequently caused us to be especially on the alert for counterattacks at these times. *Surprise is dead.*

Initially, the planning for the attack on Grassberg and Hohenberg was too "piece meal". The battalion commander should have been more thorough in planning the patrol activities

(137) Personal knowledge; (138) A-9, p. 79; Personal knowledge.

Result

prior to the attack. The patrol sent out on the morning of 18 December appeared to be an afterthought. It is my opinion that the area northwest of Grassberg should have been further patrolled on the afternoon and during the night of 17 December. The information the battalion commander desired, would have been made available in time for him to act on it. As it developed, the patrol that was dispatched on the morning of 17 December did not return in sufficient time for the plan of attack to be changed. The decision not to change the plan at that time was a sound one. *Alpha had attacked on the left flank.*

Many of the details in planning the attack on 18 December were SOP, therefore, detailed instructions relative to coordination within the battalion were omitted. This is good and saves much time that can be utilized in the preparation phase. However, detailed checks were made to insure that the plan was understood and that each individual understood the part he was to play in executing it. I feel that this part of the planning and coordinating phase prior to the attack was adequate, principally, due to the fact that the officers in the battalion had worked together for a long time. *Result is*

Communications were maintained throughout the operation through prior planning and cooperation among all elements of the battalion. It was almost impossible to maintain wire communications forward of the battalion observation post. The SCR 300 radios were used extensively throughout the battalion with excellent results. SCR 536 radios were used in the rifle company command nets, but were unsatisfactory, resulting in the primary use of messengers in these echelons. The lack of

Good

a sufficient number of SCR 300 radios to provide both of the front line 81-mm mortar observers with one, resulted in the loss of time in calling for and adjusting mortar fire. This was overcome to some extent by plotting mortar concentrations prior to the attack, insuring that at least each company commander had these concentrations plotted on his map, and the cooperation of rifle company commanders in allowing mortar observers to use their communication facilities to call for and adjust fire. This operation definitely revealed the need for a better communication system within the mortar platoon of the heavy weapons company. At the time no SCR 300 radios were organic to this platoon. Current tables of organization and equipment have corrected this deficiency to a great extent.

Sy

It is believed that the battalion observation post was too far to the rear under normal situations. However, in this instance the action of the battalion as a whole could better be influenced from Hill 412, which afforded the best observation over the battalion zone. Nothing could have been gained by placing this installation on Grassberg or Hohenberg until they were taken.

M

Both hills probably could have been taken on 18 December had Company F been committed through Company E to seize Hohenberg. Company E met light resistance from German infantry during its advance up the hill, therefore, I feel that more aggressive action on Hohenberg would have resulted in its capture, thus, relieving some of the pressure from Company G. The battalion commander could have taken advantage of this

situation had he followed the attacking echelons closely on the first day of the attack. By remaining at his observation post and not utilizing his staff to the fullest, he did not know exactly what the situation in front of Company E was.

The company commander of H Company failed to use good judgment in selecting his observation post. He selected the place that afforded the best observation without giving much thought to its location in relationship to one of his machine gun platoons. This resulted in him being brought under mortar and artillery fire that was directed at the machine gun platoon. Subsequently, the observation post had to be moved,

which probably could have been avoided. *improvement could have been made by selecting alternate positions prior to the attack*

By selecting alternate positions prior to the attack the 2d Machine Gun Platoon of Company E was able to move quickly into an area where it could continue its support mission, when it was brought under fire. This prior planning resulted in no casualties for the platoon in a situation, which could have otherwise resulted in many casualties. It is normal for the enemy to seek out automatic weapons, therefore, this was taken into account when the platoon position areas were selected.

Company G made good use of the information obtained from the patrol that was sent to Grassberg on 17 December. As was later observed, what appeared to be a covered route to Grassberg was a death trap.

Heavy machine guns, because of their ability to accurately deliver a heavy volume of sustained fire, should be employed where they can cover the entire sector of the rifle company they are to support. During this operation, the rifle

companies advanced to the point where it was unsafe to employ overhead fire, before they made contact with the enemy. Since the guns could not provide adequate support from their initial position areas, they were displaced forward by echelon. This insured that one platoon of guns was covering the forward displacement of the other as well as providing Companies G and E with protection from possible attacks from the flanks. As the situation developed, Company G could employ heavy guns with its forward platoons early in the attack. Company E was required to continue the operation without heavy machine gun support due to the fact that the battalion commander ordered the 2d Machine Gun Platoon to be employed with Company F to cover the rear of the forward positions. It cannot be stated whether or not a platoon of guns with Company E would have influenced the action on Hohenberg. Although the range and observation on Grassberg was limited, the heavy guns with Company G did a good job. They were particularly suited for the mission to cover the demolition detail that blew the pill-box in front of G Company.

The 81-mm mortars did a splendid job in supporting the battalion. Their position area was too far back to support the attack beyond the objective, but to emplace them further forward meant that ammunition would have to be hand carried, up Hill 412, since the top of the hill was the next place forward that they could have been set up. In addition to being inaccessible, it was undesirable to place the mortars on Hill 412, because it would have been an easy matter for the enemy to locate them. The mortar observation posts on Hill

412 provided a complete coverage over the greater part of the battalion zone. With two forward observers with Company G and E, observation for the mortars was as complete as the situation would permit. The high angle of fire of the 81-mm mortar makes it an excellent weapon for close in fires. Mortar fire was delivered to within a few yards of frontline troops with little danger to them. Once the fire was actually pulled into G Company's position in order to stop a counter-attack. The soundness of this action might be debatable. I am of the opinion, however, that the situation should dictate whether or not this is done. In this instance, I believe that it was justified. *because*

Only four of the six 81-mm mortars in the heavy weapons company were employed for this operation. Experience had taught that in the attack four guns could fire all the ammunition that could be supplied them by company means. This was found to be basically true in static situations.

Current tables of organization and equipment have corrected this deficiency. There are now four 81-mm mortars in the heavy weapons company instead of six as was the case at the time of this operation.

By using the 81-mm mortars in battery, a greater concentration of fire was quickly brought to bear on the enemy during counterattacks. In addition, this method of employment simplified the problem of ammunition supply to a great degree. Company vehicles were able to dump loads of ammunition in the platoon position area at a point from where all four guns were supplied.

See

The decision to destroy all bunkers and pillboxes not in use within the forward positions was sound. This denied infiltrating groups of the enemy the use of them, from which to snipe at our people coming up from the rear. This condition could have been eliminated to some degree had these boxes been destroyed at the time it was discovered that they were too many to be completely manned by the forward companies.

The soundness in the decision of the battalion commander to let Company E abandon the pillboxes and trenches captured on 18 December and pull back on line with Company G is questionable. Company E had taken these positions without too much resistance and was in no immediate danger of being cut off from the rest of the battalion. It would have been better to use part of Company F to move to the rear of Company E during the night of 18 December in order to hold all the ground gained. This is borne out by the fact that it took two days of fighting to regain these positions, which were reoccupied by the enemy during the night of 18 December.

See

The company commander of Company E used very poor judgment on 19 December when he assumed that the positions he had abandoned on 18 December were still unoccupied. Through his unthoughtfulness, Company E was denied its three officers and three enlisted men from about 1400 hours, 19 December until about 0900 hours, 20 December, while they were locked in a pillbox, which was held by the enemy. This action could have eliminated them from the battalion permanently.

In constructing obstacles in a defensive position some consideration should be given to the counterattack plan. Ap-

parently the enemy had failed to take this factor into account. In each of the counterattacks against Company G on Grassberg Hill, the Germans were forced to negotiate some of their obstacles in order to get into G Company's position. During these counterattacks the enemy's obstacles actually served as an advantage to Company G.

It is felt that at least one hot meal could have been fed the battalion each day of the attack, except, possibly the night of 18 December. There is nothing to disprove this view, for as far as I know, there were no attempts made to bring up hot food during the operation.

The establishment of the aid station in G Company's area was considered to be an excellent solution to many of the difficulties encountered in the front line companies relative to care and treatment of the wounded. This is offered, not as accepted procedure, but as a solution under the circumstances described.

While the battalion failed to capture its objective, it is felt that many valuable lessons were learned and much information was gained in connection with this type of combat, which could be applied to future operations under similar conditions. The price the battalion paid for this bit of experience was 67 killed and wounded. Of this total, Company H suffered only six men wounded. The casualty rate is not considered to be excessive under the circumstances. (139)

It is impossible to estimate the casualties inflicted

(139) A-12; Personal knowledge.

on the enemy by the battalion during this operation. The enemy dead and wounded were not counted. There was a total of 26 prisoners taken from Grassberg and Hohenberg Hills during the attack. (140)

The supply problems were typical of most operations in mountainous terrain. The resupply of ammunition is a major consideration for heavy weapons in any type of operation. During the attack on Grassberg and Hohenberg Hills these considerations and problems were multiplied several times. This was taken into account prior to the attack and was off set to a great degree by sending carrying parties forward with ammunition and supplies as soon as they were needed.

Demolitions should have been on hand in the battalion on 18 December for use on pillboxes. Advance planning in this regard would have saved time in the reduction of bunkers, which had to be taken with organic weapons of the battalion.

In my opinion, the heavy weapons company was employed correctly during this operation. The 2d Machine Gun Platoon would have been in a better position from which it could cover the battalion flanks had it been left on Hill 412.

LESSONS

Many lessons were learned from this operation of which a few are submitted below:

1. In order to penetrate a fortified area, unit fronts must be narrow.

(140) A-12; Personal knowledge.

2. Information of the enemy and terrain must be timely, if it is to be used effectively.

3. Heavy machine guns are excellent weapons for covering fires.

4. Pillboxes can be reduced by infantry without the support of heavy caliber guns designed for this purpose.

5. Problems of ammunition resupply are often times increased several fold in mountainous country.

6. Heavy machine guns can be knocked out by small arms fire.

7. Alternate and supplementary positions are a must for machine guns. (Tactical training should be so thorough that this becomes second nature to machine gunners.)

8. Observation is one of the most important considerations in the employment of infantry heavy weapons.

9. All infantrymen should know how to call for and adjust mortar fire and all leaders should know how to call for and adjust artillery fire.

10. The enemy will seek out automatic weapons. This factor must be considered when employing them.

11. Commanders of all echelons must dispose themselves at places where they can best influence the action. This might well be the spot where the most trouble is.

12. A good supply system is essential to any operation. Additional considerations must be given to the system when the operation is over difficult terrain and in a fortified area.

13. Where casualties cannot be evacuated within a

reasonable period of time, provisions should be made to care for ^{Casualties} them in the frontline area.

14. In selecting observation posts, position areas of automatic weapons must be taken into account. They should be so located that fires directed at other installations will not neutralize them.

15. Communications and personnel are two of the most important factors in combat.

16. Ground gained should not be relinquished unless it is essential to the operation.

17. 81-mm mortars are potent weapons and can assist materially in changing the tide of battle.

18. By plotting mortar concentrations on the maps of all company commanders prior to an operation, mortar fire can be brought to bear on a target quickly and accurately expending a minimum of ammunition.